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## What You Need To Know About Mercury

### What is Mercury?

When you think of mercury, you probably think of the red or silver liquid inside of a thermometer. When you put the thermometer in your mouth, the mercury tells you how high your temperature is. Mercury is used for other things too. It is sometimes used in batteries, certain types of paint, and in some electrical equipment

### Is Mercury Dangerous?

Mercury can be useful to us, but it can also be harmful if it is not handled properly. Mercury can make you very sick if you touch it, eat it, or breathe it in. It is safe when it is inside a thermometer, because you can't touch it. If a thermometer breaks and the mercury leaks out, it can be dangerous. Leave the room, close the door, and get help right away. Exposure to high levels of elemental mercury vapor can result in nervous system damage including tremors, and mood and personality alterations. Exposure to relatively high levels of inorganic mercury salts can cause kidney damage.

### What To Do If Mercury Spills

- Contact the local poison control center, fire department, or public health board for advice on cleanup.
- Ask everyone to leave the area.
- Open windows and doors in the area of the spill to ventilate the area during cleanup.
- Do not use a vacuum cleaner to clean up a mercury spill. A vacuum cleaner will spread the mercury vapors into the air.

### Can Mercury Hurt the Environment?

Mercury is a natural element. This means that it is a natural part of the environment and can be found in soil, air, water, and living animals. The amount of mercury that is normally found in the environment is very, very small and will not hurt us. But if there are large amounts of mercury in the environment, then it can be dangerous. Large amounts of mercury are sometimes found at Superfund sites. Superfund sites are areas that are polluted with hazardous waste that can be harmful to humans and the environment. Mercury can come from batteries, paints, and other wastes that may have been carelessly thrown away or spilled on the ground. If there is a lot of mercury in the environment it could pollute the air, water, and soil. It could also contaminate the fish that we eat. The Environmental Protection Agency is working to clean up contaminated sites and to make sure that mercury waste doesn't hurt people or the environment.

Need more information?

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